

## A complex collage titled "2001 EDITION" featuring a central globe, musical instruments (violin, cello), books (Poetry, Eliot, Austen), scientific symbols (DNA, infinity, CO2, \$1,542.60), and various geometric shapes and patterns.

## COLLEGE-LEVEL EXAMINATION PROGRAM

# American Literature

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## Description of the Examination

The Subject Examination in American Literature covers the material that is usually taught in a two-semester survey course (or the equivalent) at the college level. It deals with prose and poetry written in the United States from colonial times to the present. It is primarily a test of knowledge about literary works — their content, backgrounds, and authors — but also requires familiarity with the terminology used by literary critics and historians. The exam emphasizes fiction and poetry, and deals to a lesser degree with the essay, drama, and autobiography.

In both coverage and approach, the exam resembles the chronologically organized survey of American literature offered by many colleges. It assumes that the candidate has read widely and developed an appreciation of American literature, knows the basic literary periods, and has a sense of the historical development of American literature.

The test contains approximately 100 multiple-choice questions to be answered in two separately timed 45-minute sections.

There is also an optional essay section that can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice test. Contact the school where you would like to receive credit for your CLEP exam to see if they require the optional essay section for this exam. The essay section is graded by the institution that requests it.

## Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the test require candidates to demonstrate one or more of the following abilities.

- Knowledge of the content of particular literary works — their characters, plots, settings, themes, etc. (about 50-60 percent of the exam)
- Ability to understand and interpret short poems or excerpts from long poems and prose works presented in the test book (about 25-35 percent of the exam)
- Knowledge of the historical and social settings of specific works, their authors, and their relations to other literary works and to literary traditions (about 10 percent of the exam)

- Understanding of the critical theories of American writers, and of critical terms, verse forms, and literary devices (about 5 percent of the exam)

The American Literature exam requires a knowledge and understanding of the works and writers of the following periods. The column at the left indicates the percentage of questions devoted to each of the five periods.

| ➡      | <i>Approximate Percent of Examination</i>    |
|--------|--|
| 10-15% | Colonial and Early National (1620-1830)      |
| 25%    | Romantic (1830-1870)                         |
| 25%    | Realistic and Early Naturalistic (1870-1910) |
| 25%    | Modern (1910-1945)                           |
| 10-15% | Contemporary (1945-present)                  |

## Sample Questions

The 45 sample questions that follow are similar to questions on the American Literature exam, but they do not actually appear on it.

Before attempting to answer the sample questions, read all of the information about the American Literature exam on the preceding pages. Additional suggestions for preparing for CLEP exams are provided in Chapter 1.

Try to answer correctly as many questions as possible. Then compare your answers with the correct answers, given at the end of this examination guide.

**Directions:** Each of the questions or incomplete statements below is followed by five suggested answers or completions. Select the one that is best in each case.

1. Which of the following first recognized Walt Whitman as the great poet of the democratic spirit of America?
  - (A) Nathaniel Hawthorne    (B) Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - (C) Herman Melville    (D) Edgar Allan Poe
  - (E) Henry David Thoreau

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

2. The “unpardonable sin” committed by Ethan Brand is
- (A) allowing one’s intellectual curiosity to violate the privacy of others
  - (B) any mortal transgression not followed by repentance
  - (C) the attempt to improve upon God’s handiwork
  - (D) loss of faith in God
  - (E) ambition deteriorating into a lust for power
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

**Questions 3–4**

- Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain,  
 Who after birth didst by my side remain,  
 Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,  
 Who thee abroad, exposed to public view,  
 (5) Made thee in rags, halting to th’ press to trudge,  
 Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).  
 At thy return my blushing was not small,  
 My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,  
 I cast thee by as one unfit for light,  
 Thy visage was so irksome in my sight. . . .

3. In line 1, “offspring” most probably refers to the author’s
- (A) philosophy    (B) book of poems
  - (C) unwanted child    (D) despair
  - (E) intelligence
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
4. “My rambling brat” (line 8) is an example of
- (A) epigram
  - (B) alliteration
  - (C) simile
  - (D) personification
  - (E) hyperbole
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

5. In *The Federalist*, No. X, James Madison proposed that the dangers of factions be controlled by a
- (A) republican form of government
  - (B) pure democracy
  - (C) curtailment of individual liberty
  - (D) reapportionment of property
  - (E) clause for emergency rule by a minority
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
6. Characters with the last names of Snopes, Compson, and Sartoris figure prominently in the fiction of
- (A) Eudora Welty
  - (B) Flannery O'Connor
  - (C) Thomas Wolfe
  - (D) William Faulkner
  - (E) Robert Penn Warren
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

**Questions 7–8**

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust.

- (5) I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and I threw them out the window in disgust.
7. The sentences above are taken from the opening pages of
- (A) *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne
  - (B) *Nature*, Emerson
  - (C) *Bartleby the Scrivener*, Melville
  - (D) *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman
  - (E) *Walden*, Thoreau
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
8. The phrase “the furniture of my mind was all undusted still” can best be paraphrased by which of the following?
- (A) I had become morose and antisocial.
  - (B) I had not examined my ideas and beliefs.
  - (C) I needed a change of scene.
  - (D) I was intellectually and emotionally exhausted.
  - (E) I had become so lazy that I could not work.
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

9. Which of the following poets derived the title, the plan, and much of the symbolism of one of his or her major poems from Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* ?

(A) Wallace Stevens      (B) T. S. Eliot  
(C) Robert Frost      (D) Marianne Moore  
(E) Langston Hughes

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

10. About which of the following works did Ernest Hemingway say, "It's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that"?

(A) *The Last of the Mohicans*  
(B) *Moby Dick*  
(C) *The Scarlet Letter*  
(D) *Walden*  
(E) *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

11. Which of the following writers was particularly important in the development of the short story as a literary form?

(A) James Fenimore Cooper      (B) Harriet Beecher Stowe  
(C) Frederick Douglass      (D) Edgar Allan Poe  
(E) Edith Wharton

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

Make me, O Lord, thy Spining Wheele compleate,  
Thy Holy Worde my Distaff make for mee.  
Make mine Affections thy Swift Flyers neate  
And make my Soule thy holy Spoole to bee.

- (5) My Conversation make to be thy Reelee  
And reele the yarn thereon spun of thy Wheele.

12. The passage above is notable chiefly for

(A) irony of statement      (B) pathetic fallacy  
(C) a literary conceit      (D) a paradox  
(E) a simile

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

13. Which of the following best states the theme of Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat"?
- (A) The fate of humanity is largely in its own hands.
  - (B) By acts of courage, people may overcome inherent weakness.
  - (C) Nature, though seemingly hostile, is actually indifferent to human beings.
  - (D) Through perseverance, a world of peace and harmony will ultimately be achieved.
  - (E) In any struggle, the strongest are fated to survive.
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
14. In *The Great Gatsby*, who is directly responsible for the death of Myrtle Wilson?
- (A) Daisy Buchanan
  - (B) Jay Gatsby
  - (C) Tom Buchanan
  - (D) Nick Carraway
  - (E) George Wilson
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
15. Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James are commonly described by literary historians as
- (A) transcendentalists
  - (B) symbolists
  - (C) realists
  - (D) romantics
  - (E) naturalists
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
16. All of the following were written by Toni Morrison EXCEPT
- (A) *Song of Solomon*
  - (B) *Tar Baby*
  - (C) *The Bluest Eye*
  - (D) *Sula*
  - (E) *The Color Purple*
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

**Questions 17–18**

Tree at my window, window tree,  
My sash is lowered when night comes on;  
But let there never be curtain drawn  
Between you and me.

- (5) Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,  
And nest thing most diffuse to cloud,  
Not all your light tongues talking aloud  
Could be profound.

- But, tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,  
(10) And if you have seen me when I slept,  
You have seen me when I was taken and swept  
And all but lost.

- That day she put our heads together,  
Fate had her imagination about her,  
(15) Your head so much concerned with outer,  
Mine with inner, weather.\*

\*From *The Poetry of Robert Frost* edited by Edward Connery Lathem, Copyright 1928, © 1969 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Copyright © 1956 by Robert Frost, Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Publishers.

17. The “light tongues” (line 7) are a metaphorical reference to the tree’s  
(A) frivolous thoughts    (B) inquisitiveness    (C) large branches  
(D) imagination    (E) leaves    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
18. When the tree is “taken and tossed” (line 9), the speaker sees the tree as  
an image of  
(A) the ruthlessness of nature  
(B) his own troubled mind  
(C) the uncertainty of Fate herself  
(D) a lack of seriousness in nature  
(E) shaken but unbowed human will    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
- 
19. Which of the following novels has as its main concern the experiences of  
an African American protagonist?  
(A) *All the King’s Men*    (B) *The Age of Innocence*  
(C) *Henderson the Rain King*    (D) *Invisible Man*  
(E) *The Catcher in the Rye*    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

20. Which of the following does NOT appear in a poem by Emily Dickinson?

- (A) A fly in a still room making an “uncertain stumbling buzz”
- (B) A slanted ray of late afternoon winter sunlight
- (C) A rain-filled red wheelbarrow “beside the white chickens”
- (D) A train metaphorically described in terms of a horse
- (E) A saddened person who “never lost as much but twice”

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

**Questions 21–22**

Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to

(5) understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are. They are different.

21. In this passage, which of the following best describes the speaker’s attitude toward the very rich?

- (A) He finds their cynicism alarming and unwarranted.
- (B) He believes that, because of their advantages and experiences, the rich know more than others do.
- (C) He is envious of their moral superiority.
- (D) He thinks that he understands their psychology even though he has not shared their advantages.
- (E) He finds them so different from the rest of society as to be practically unknowable.

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

22. The passage was written by

- (A) F. Scott Fitzgerald      (B) Willa Cather
- (C) John Steinbeck      (D) Sinclair Lewis
- (E) Theodore Dreiser

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

23. The King and the Duke in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are  
 (A) aristocrats (B) confidence men  
 (C) slaves (D) tradesmen  
 (E) slavetraders  
 (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
24. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts  
 (A) the plight of dispossessed farmers who migrate to California  
 (B) prison conditions in turn-of-the-century America  
 (C) a wounded soldier who tries in vain to escape the effects of war  
 (D) racial problems in a small farming town in Oklahoma  
 (E) a drifter and his friend who dream hopelessly of better lives  
 (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
25. All of the following were first published in the 1850's EXCEPT  
 (A) Thoreau's *Walden* (B) Emerson's *Nature*  
 (C) Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (D) Melville's *Moby Dick*  
 (E) Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*  
 (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
26. At the end of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, the heroine does which of the following?  
 (A) Travels to a new home.  
 (B) Walks into the sea.  
 (C) Makes a speech.  
 (D) Has a child.  
 (E) Marries for the second time.  
 (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
27. Bigger Thomas is the central character in  
 (A) Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*  
 (B) Carson McCullers' "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe"  
 (C) Richard Wright's *Native Son*  
 (D) Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find"  
 (E) Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*  
 (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

28. The title character of Henry James's *Daisy Miller* finally
- (A) adjusts to the mores of international society in Europe
  - (B) chooses the life of an artist rather than marriage
  - (C) enters a convent in France
  - (D) dies as the result of a night visit to the Colosseum
  - (E) marries an Italian nobleman
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
29. Which of the following writers was a part of the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of African American literature and art during the 1920's and 1930's?
- (A) Frederick Douglass
  - (B) Zora Neale Hurston
  - (C) Phillis Wheatley
  - (D) Alice Walker
  - (E) James Baldwin
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
30. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men — and what multitudes of them they knew not. Neither could they as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weather-beaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue.
- The passage above is from
- (A) William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*
  - (B) Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
  - (C) James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*
  - (D) Thoreau's *Walden*
  - (E) Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
31. James T. Farrell, John Dos Passos, and John Steinbeck were a group who performed for the thirties much the same service that Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser had performed for an earlier generation in America.
- The service referred to above is that of
- (A) social criticism
  - (B) stylistic innovation
  - (C) humorous entertainment
  - (D) chronicling of regional customs
  - (E) celebration of urban life
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

32. The Native American author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *House Made of Dawn* is
- (A) N. Scott Momaday    (B) Louise Erdrich  
(C) Leslie Marmon Silko    (D) Toni Cade Bambara  
(E) Jack Kerouac    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
33. The characters Shug Avery, Celie, and Mister appear in which of the following novels?
- (A) *The Color Purple*    (B) *Song of Solomon*  
(C) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*    (D) *Native Son*  
(E) *Light in August*    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
34. All of the following are writers of the Colonial era EXCEPT:
- (A) Anne Bradstreet    (B) Margaret Fuller  
(C) Cotton Mather    (D) Phillis Wheatley  
(E) Roger Williams    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
35. Which of the following best describes a theme of Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"?
- (A) The desire of the poet to retreat to the protected life of the child  
(B) The grief that overwhelmed America at Lincoln's death  
(C) The celebration of America as the hope of the world  
(D) The anguish of a man confronted by war  
(E) The awakening of the poet to his vocation    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
36. The first of the four sections in *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by
- (A) Caddy    (B) Quentin    (C) Benjy  
(D) Jason    (E) Dilsey    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
37. Which of the following best describes people as they are portrayed in the fiction of Crane, Dreiser, and Norris?
- (A) Victims of original sin  
(B) Self-determining entities  
(C) Creatures shaped by biological, social, and economic factors  
(D) Beings whose biological natures are fixed, but who are able to manipulate their environments  
(E) Individuals who must be awakened to the fact that their wills are free  
(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

38. Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

The passage above is an example of

- (A) Puritanism    (B) Transcendentalism    (C) Naturalism  
(D) Realism    (E) Deism
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
39. Which of the following writers was born into a family of New England ministers but achieved popular success with a novel set in the American South?
- (A) Mary Wilkins Freeman  
(B) Sarah Orne Jewett  
(C) Harriet Beecher Stowe  
(D) Rebecca Harding Davis  
(E) Louisa May Alcott
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
40. The poetry of Edward Taylor is most appropriately likened in its characteristic techniques to that of
- (A) a Confessional poet, such as Robert Lowell  
(B) a Romantic poet, such as John Keats  
(C) an Imagist poet, such as Ezra Pound  
(D) a Transcendentalist poet, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson  
(E) a Metaphysical poet, such as John Donne
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
41. All of the following writers deal extensively with the Jewish American experience EXCEPT
- (A) Philip Roth    (B) Bernard Malamud  
(C) Saul Bellow    (D) John Barth  
(E) Isaac Bashevis Singer
- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

42. So it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath his soul changed. He came from hot plowshares to prospects of clover tranquilly, and it was as if hot plowshares were not. Scars faded as flowers.

It rained. The procession of weary soldiers became a bedraggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low, wretched sky. Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks. He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past.

The name of the central character in the work from which the passage is taken is

- (A) Thomas Sutpen    (B) Henry Fleming  
(C) Clyde Griffiths    (D) Frederic Henry  
(E) Nick Carraway    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
43. Which of the following poets is best known for sonnets that combine a traditional verse form with a concern for modern women's issues?
- (A) Edna St. Vincent Millay    (B) Gertrude Stein  
(C) Marianne Moore    (D) H. D.  
(E) Amy Lowell    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
44. All of the following influenced the naturalist movement in American literature EXCEPT
- (A) Charles Darwin's theory of evolution  
(B) Karl Marx's theories of economic competition  
(C) Sigmund Freud's theories of unconscious motivation  
(D) Emile Zola's documentary novels of slum life  
(E) Matthew Arnold's concepts of Hebraism and Hellenism  
(A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
45. Which of the following writers wrote tales and "romances" set in Puritan New England?
- (A) Emily Dickinson    (B) Nathaniel Hawthorne  
(C) Walt Whitman    (D) Anne Bradstreet  
(E) William Dean Howells    (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

## Optional Essay Section

If your college requires that the optional essay section be taken in addition to the multiple-choice exam, you should review the following information.

The optional essay section of the American Literature exam draws from the same general content as does the multiple-choice test. Its purpose is to test the candidate's ability to write about American literature in an informed and organized manner. While good writing skills and knowledge of grammar will enhance the candidate's ability to respond to the questions, the optional section is not intended to be a test of these abilities.

Candidates are required to answer two of three essay questions within a 90-minute period. The first question, which is required, asks candidates to apply to American authors a critical generalization stated in the test book. They must support their statements with examples from the works of a list of American authors. For the second essay, candidates may choose to discuss either a prose passage or a poem printed in the test book. Instructions for each selection indicate what should be included in the discussion, and some thought-provoking comments and questions are provided as guides in organizing the essay.

For additional information, read the sections on "Taking Essay Tests," in Chapter 2, and "How Essays Are Graded," in Chapter 3.

## Study Resources

To prepare for the American Literature exam, you should read critically the contents of at least one anthology, which you can find in most college bookstores. Most textbook anthologies contain a representative sample of readings as well as discussions of historical background, literary styles and devices characteristic of various authors and periods, and other material relevant to the test. The anthologies do vary somewhat in their content, approach, and emphasis; you are advised to consult more than one or to consult some specialized books on major authors, periods, and literary forms and terminology. You should also read some of the major novels that are mentioned or excerpted in the anthologies, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Other novelists whose major works you should be familiar with include Melville, Crane, Wharton, Cather, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Ellison, and Wright. You can probably obtain an extensive reading list of American literature from a college English department, library, or bookstore.

Additional suggestions for preparing for CLEP exams are given in Chapter 1.

## *Answers to Sample Questions*

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### American Literature

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. B  | 26. B |
| 2. A  | 27. C |
| 3. B  | 28. D |
| 4. D  | 29. B |
| 5. A  | 30. A |
| 6. D  | 31. A |
| 7. E  | 32. A |
| 8. B  | 33. A |
| 9. B  | 34. B |
| 10. E | 35. E |
| 11. D | 36. C |
| 12. C | 37. C |
| 13. C | 38. A |
| 14. A | 39. C |
| 15. C | 40. E |
| 16. E | 41. D |
| 17. E | 42. B |
| 18. B | 43. A |
| 19. D | 44. E |
| 20. C | 45. B |
| 21. D |       |
| 22. A |       |
| 23. B |       |
| 24. A |       |
| 25. B |       |